

Evolved Femininity: An analysis on K R Meera's Novel Aarachar

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Abstract: *The demarcation between men and women on the basis of gender has moved a long way from the stereotyped views of the society. The theoretical dimensions gave wide possibilities to analyse the very concept of gender and sex. Gender has become a fluid concept with end number of features in it that can be chosen by an individual. K. R Meera's novel Aarachar questions the basic distinction of men and women drawn by the codes and conventions of the society. By creating, a quantified table for analysing the features of society perceived male and female, it is easy to illustrate how much K.R.Meera has moved to break the rigid system. The paper has distinguished the novel into two for a clear analysis, as gendered self and metamorphosed self, on the grounds of gender theory.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The grade to which, people identify themselves as feminine or masculine defines their gender or the categorisation of femininity or masculinity, this constitutes the idea of a man and woman in the society. In spite of the chromosomal differences, the society has put forth norms that set standards of typical and ideal male and female behaviour. The norms attributed to the female put them in the second category which is submissive to men. But femininity is not a weaker gender rather it is the epitome of reactive strength. Tracing examples from "Puranas", Draupadi with her untied hair portrays the agitated female, resisting patriarchal domination. However, our culture and history moulded by the patriarchal male hands projects the examples like Sheelavathi, Sathi, Seetha and so on, without allowing a second reading possible for installing the ideal femininity. It is from this trap femininity has to emerge and should shed off its attributed behaviours. It is for this idea a new generation of women writers turn the contemporary fiction into a laboratory of experiments and innovations. K. R. Meera is an example of the compelling voices, who had experimented with a wide range of sensitive themes. In this paper, we analyse K. R. Meera's *Aarachar* in Malayalam translated into English as *Hangwoman* by J Devika for a wider reading public. The challenging quest starts with the title *Aarachar* itself, denotes the 'hangman' in Malayalam which did not even has a feminine counter word. This dissertation titled "Evolved Femininity: An analysis of K R Meera's novel *Aarachar*" throws light into a new area of womanhood by analysing the gender schematization in *Hangwoman* along with analysing the elevated journey of a woman from the constructed femininity to the emerged self.

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II. OBJECTIVES

This paper shades the baseless theories of gender that has read in parallel to the sex. The paper takes new gender theories starting from the theorist like Judith Butler and Simone De Beauvoir. It proves the biological distinction as primitive and should be changed. The ideas highlighted to prove these arguments are:

1. The evolution experienced with the change in circumstances
2. A movement from the categorised trades to new forms, to prove the irrelevance of the categories.
3. How the suppression worked in a conditioned atmosphere.
4. The power play of the gender in societal terms.

III. HYPOTHESIS

This paper tries to discuss the evolution of the concept of gender by placing *Aarachar* as the main text in the preview of the theory gender studies. With the reference from the text, it aims to identify the fluidity in the rigid constructed concepts of gender.

1. How the conditioning limits the female gender to follow the prepared path.
2. How the male experience immense power in the power structure mere through their birth as male.
3. How the female is even constrained to express her sexual desires.

IV. METHODOLOGY

For the achievement of objectives, the parameters selected are the gender theory and its dimensions to interpret the evolution of the self. A qualitative analysis has made to bring up the concept of gender division in the Indian background and the conditioning processed with the customs and traditions to move with same concepts. A semiotic analysis in a limited sense is made to explain the intentions and meanings of words as signs and symbols.

V. SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

The paper could refer to more practical life situation referring to the main text, which shows the Indian traditions and customs that suppress women in their fields. It could also inspire the movement that is said to be rigid and that is not. This paper makes ways to a further study of a section of northern Indian life context, where men dominate and the dichotomised division is so concrete. The paper could not explore the gender fluidity fully due to the constraints in the subject discussed in the main text. The break



from the dichotomised male and female to the transgender realm stood unexplored due to the limitation in the subject considered by the writer in the main text.

5.1 Gendered Self

In philosophical and sociological theories, gender or gender variation is considered as a social construction hence, gender roles are created by the patriarchal society. The focuses on power and hierarchy have made a great role in placing female gender as ‘other’ in the society. Harvard psychologist Steven Pinker in his work states that “some categories really are social constructions: they exist only because people tacitly agree to act as if they exist”(202). Clearly ideas of male and female nature, derives less from empirical facts and observation and more from norms and expectation. Thus, a timid man believes that he is less of a man while a bold woman imagines that she is less feminine than other women. But these feelings are mere fancy of the individuals taking in account of what the society wants from them.

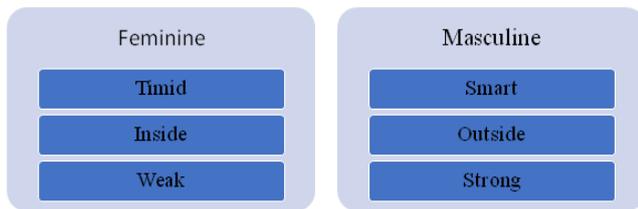


Figure: 1 constructed division

Over the centuries, gender differences have been variously discussed but nothing proves to be satisfactory. The society dominated by men came up with certain dogmas where spaces of home have identified with women and outside world is linked to productive work. It is against this, contemporary women writers have taken their mighty pen. They had contrasting styles and experiences, but were united in their focus of issue that underpin women’s identity. K R Meera’s Aarachar is one such experiment which deals with the themes like failed love, infidelity and broken childhood. For K R Meera, it is a daring panoramic sweep of its canvas for the sheer audacity of its narrative logic, for inseting and probing the Malayalis notion of femininity and masculinity, for its irreverent play with the paradoxes of life, love and death. M.Leelavathy , a prominent critic in Malayalam, notes that the work Aarachar inherits the path of Khasakinte Ithihasam by O V Vijayan, a significant novel which got acceptance for the exploration of regional culture of a fictional land. The author seems determined to retrieve a feminine history to forge a historical continuum and create a collectiveness of women’s identity. Hangwoman deals with the changes that happen to Chetna Grddha Mullick, a twenty-year-old girl to the world’s first female executioner. At the beginning of the novel, she was none other than a girl who was educated only up to plus-two conditioned by the society to be in her home and acquire the roles which completes her femininity. It was for the survival of the family and with the pressure of media, she hailed into the position as hangwoman. Even there she was just a puppet in the hands of her father and the media man Sanjeev Kumar Mitra who ask for her hand to her father Grddha Mullick, wanted only a career hike and contained her with his every look and words.

5.2 Metamorphosed Self

Our society is masculine to its very depth and masculinity can be referred back from the evolution of the patriarchal society. The ideas like domination of male gender, superior power possessed by the male category, assumed concept of a man are not only an elaborative term that explains the construction or the evolution of a dominant state, but also has become an analytical area of suppression over women. Masculinity and femininity has then turned into an area of focus and basic idea as far as Gender Studies has concerned. The acceptance of the system patriarchy privileged male gender over female and had only little or no right keeping possession, whether it be sexual, intellectual and material . Hence, in a patriarchal world, women should find their way of struggle to get educated, to own material assets and to take decisions regarding their life. We have many instances in the novel to substantiate it. In the case of Chetna’s education and marriage, her wish or opinion was not taken into consideration. On the other hand, for men, enjoys the privilege of possessing things and society assimilated it as their right to claim and consider themselves brave enough to take decisions of their own. Chetna is made just a subordinate in the internalised practises of the men around her. Chetna has skilled in making the note used for hanging from her day of birth or even before that. She has crafted a noose out of the umbilical code when she was in mother’s womb before the birth. She even tried and successfully ended to make a noose in forced circumstance out of his dupatta. Hangwoman to a great extent deals with the gender differences existing in the society. The power politics of gender is a continuous undercurrent throughout the book. The chauvinistic nature of male is presented through the characters of Sanjeev Kumar Mitra, considering Chetna as a mere sexual object and Grddha Mullick, who has less idea about the greatness of women. He values neither his wife nor his daughter. Through the characters Chetna, her mother and her grandmother, the concept of ‘pativrata’ has highlighted. A ‘pativrata’ denotes chaste woman who is moralistic and has pledged to be a ‘pathivrata’, chaste women throughout his life. The characteristics of ‘pathivriyam’ look forward for faithfulness of her heart, mind and soul (three abstract concepts of Hindu philosophy). But the interesting fact is that there is no masculine word for ‘pativrata’. This implies clear gender discrimination. They were compelled to use the words even when it was known to be discriminatory against them in sound, meaning and ideas. When a woman says that she is proud of the great cultural ‘pythrikan’ (paternity) of India, she does not realise that this word excludes her gender. Also, words like ‘virgin’, ‘whore’, ‘pativrata’ are anti-women. None of these has an equivalent masculine word. Chetna emerges into a new self, showing great valour and fortitude. Women’s extraordinary awakening strengthens their ego due to their necessity of survival. It is possible for women to enter into a new space altogether to create a new identity. Here Chetna intentionally avoids Sanjeev Mitra, who was a barrier, to clear the way to her true existence by tying a noose around his neck for her survival. The approach of detachment from others and attachment



to her true self is a wonderful ground from which the feminine in her can exercise its renewing power. Here Chetna, does not want to be a hangman's daughter rather a hangwoman. She changes from a voiceless obedient daughter to India's first hangwoman. Her fiance Sanjeev Kumar Mitra says, she represent the innate strength and virtue of women and wants to marry her, but he is really interested only in her as an object to utilise, a mere body to him. He pinches her breast hard and states with a casual brutality that he would like to "fuck her hard even if only once." Chetna's awakening to her own womanhood is both repulsed by and draws to this crude advance, having known neither tenderness nor elegance from the men around her. Every woman in the society tends to move with the flow unless they find their situation intolerable. It is from the environment surround of those untamed men, one comes out and finds her emerged self. Woman who undergoes harsh realities realises their strength out of necessity and sprouts out. Within these, some voices inspires the suppressed femininity to raise their wings and emerge.

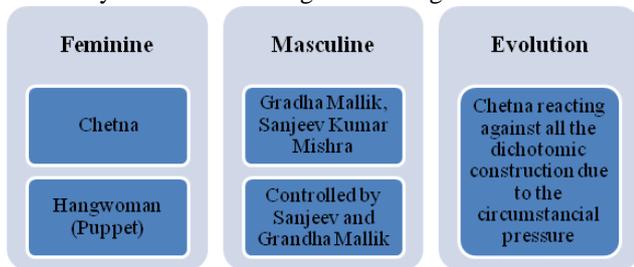


Figure: 2 Unconventional gender division.

Through the novel *Hangwoman*, K. R Meera launches a scathing criticism of the harshness, double standards and hypocritical attitude of the society towards women. *Hangwoman* is not merely a novel with unique plot structure that portrays strong woman; instead, it comes as a step against the subjective historical analysis of history as male centred, signifies a need for writing "her story", and disintegrates the gender stereotypes. Believing that history has never done justice to women, it tears them from its pages, hopes to correct that within these narratives. Chetna becomes one of the strongest and most tenacious of women ever conceived of in the literary imagination. Through this, she proves that there is nothing a woman cannot do.

VI. CONCLUSION

The book *Hang woman* unravels a typical life of a north Indian woman who is raised and brought in the lines of patriarchal terms. Taking this book as a base, the male dominated societal terms of gender demarcated deepened roots have pulled out to redefine the gender. The paper has quantified the qualities attributed to both genders to illustrate the impractical base of it and has re-qualified the deviated traditions to prove the body less form of gender identity, that can be made according to the wish of individuals. The main characters fail to maintain the order of the society as the circumstance forced to explore more than the constructed forms.

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